

# LE TRASFORMAZIONI DELLE *ÉLITES* IN ETÀ TARDOANTICA

a cura di Rita Lizzi Testa

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## CURIALES INTO CHURCHMEN: THE CASE OF GREGORY NAZIANZEN

NEIL McLYNN

### 1. *The Setting: Gregory and his City*

Two famous chapters of the *Theodosian Code* provide a vivid impression of the changing character of both the secular and the religious leadership of the late antique city during the three generations between the accession of Constantine and the death of Theodosius I. The chapter dealing with «Christian Bishops and Clergy» preserves 28 imperial pronouncements from this period, awarding privileges to the clergy and securing their monopoly over public sacrifice in their cities (*C. Th.* 16, 2, 1-28); no fewer than 139 measures survive from the same period dealing with the councils of the cities (*C. Th.* 12, 1, 1-139), the great majority of them aiming to prevent those qualified as councillors from evading their obligation to serve<sup>1</sup>. The two chapters overlap, for one of the career options available to ambitious young men

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<sup>1</sup> On the changing profile of the Christian bishop, see R. LIZZI TESTA, *The Bishop, "Vir Venerabilis": Fiscal Privileges and Status Definition in Late Antiquity*, in *SP*, 34 (2001), pp. 76-96; C. RAPP, *The Elite Status of Bishops in Late Antiquity in Ecclesiastical, Spiritual and Social Contexts*, in C. RAPP, M. Salzman (eds.), *Elites in Late Antiquity* = «*Arethusa*», 33, 3 (2000), pp. 379-399. For the position of *curiales*, see F. Millar, *The Ancient City, Augustus to Julian: Obligations, Excuses and Status*, in «*JRS*», 73 (1983), pp. 76-96; A.H.M. JONES, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*, Oxford, 1964, pp. 737-763.

of curial stock seeking exemption from their responsibilities was now the Christian priesthood – and their wealth, education and local influence made such men especially attractive as candidates for the episcopate<sup>2</sup>. Bishops had of course been recruited from the municipal elite before Constantine; but not until the later fourth century did it become the case that «if you scratch a bishop, you will most likely find a *curialis*»<sup>3</sup>. An overall trend can thus be identified during the period, which saw, on the one hand, bishops (in a sense) displacing *curiales* from their traditional civic leadership role, and on the other, individual *curiales*, in many cities, becoming presbyters and bishops. But the details of these interrelated processes remain unclear and controverted<sup>4</sup>. Above all, we lack detailed information about the relationship, in any given city in the empire, between the curial and clerical elites, and the tensions that might have emerged when members of the former sought a new career among the latter. This paper is an attempt to explore some consequences of this particular category of elite transformation, whereby an individual member of the curial order joined the clergy of his city.

The best documented bishops with explicitly attested curial roots are Augustine of Hippo and Synesius of Cyrene. However, neither of them became bishop of the city where their families held their property; and both had brothers on whom their local responsibilities devolved<sup>5</sup>. Neither moved far, but physical displacement created a sense of safe distance. Although Synesius' brother Euoptius preferred flight to Alexandria to his brother's vacated seat in Cyrene, Syne-

<sup>2</sup> Titles dealing with curial priests are evenly divided between the two chapters: *C. Th.* 12, 1, 49, 59, 104, 115, 121, 123; 16, 2, 3, 6, 17, 19, 21.

<sup>3</sup> F.D. GILLIARD, *Senatorial Bishops in the Fourth Century*, in «HTHR», 77 (1984), pp. 153-175, at p. 155. For *curiales* in the clergy, see Jones, *Later Roman Empire* (cit. n. 1), pp. 920-927.

<sup>4</sup> The debate on civic transformation is crisply summarized by J.H.W.G. LIEBESCHUETZ, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City*, Oxford 2001, pp. 1-5; note also pp. 137-139, arguing that the «rise of the bishop» was «in fact the obverse of the decline of civic political institutions».

<sup>5</sup> For Synesius and the *curia*, see D. ROQUES, *Synésios de Cyrène et la Cyrénaïque du Bas-Empire*, Paris 1988, pp. 126-138; for Augustine's family background, see B.D. SHAW, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Experience of Augustine*, in «P&P», 115 (1987), pp. 3-51.

sius was able to mediate in the ensuing controversy rather than being directly involved<sup>6</sup>. In fact, there is only one well-documented source for the difficulties that might arise when a man of curial stock, and liable for local service, became bishop of his own city: Gregory of Nazianzus. Gregory's father, moreover, was himself a classic example of the *curialis*-turned bishop, having embarked on a clerical career after holding (and refusing to profit from) «a rank second to none in *politeia*» (*Or.* 18, 6), a clear reference to his position among the *principales*, the leading group of *curiales*<sup>7</sup>. The father's considerable property remained in the family; his two sons will therefore have remained eligible for his seat on the council (and liable for the attendant responsibilities)<sup>8</sup>. Much that has seemed puzzling about the career of Gregory Nazianzen can be explained as a response to this situation. Deeply implicated in both the clerical and the secular elite of his own city, throughout his life he resisted full assimilation into either.

Nazianzus was a peculiar *polis*, whose peculiarities will have affected both its church and its council. The urban centre was physically unimpressive: «small, and least among the cities, even to be ruler of which is nothing very noble or glorious» as Gregory once pointedly reminded the *curiales* when urging them to seek instead «first place in the City of God» (*Or.* 19, 11)<sup>9</sup>. Its territory, however, was considerable.

<sup>6</sup> Synes. *Ep.* 94, with ROQUES, *Synésios de Cyrène* (cit. n. 5), p. 127.

<sup>7</sup> The phrase recalls that used by Libanius for the *principales* of Antioch, τὰ πρώτα τῆς πόλεως (*Or.* 14, 5; *Ep.* 181, 3; cfr. *Ep.* 146); cfr. P. PETIT, *Libanius et la vie municipale à Antioche*, Paris 1956, pp. 83-90. The otherwise illuminating discussion by R. VAN DAM, *Families and Friends in Late Roman Cappadocia*, Philadelphia 2003, pp. 41-44, diminishes Gregory's father unduly by consigning him among «thousands and thousands of other nondescript local elites».

<sup>8</sup> Gregory's brother escaped by seeking court office: note Gregory's defensive remark at his funeral, that he had done so from a desire τοῦ προστατεύειν τῆς πόλεως (*Or.* 7, 9); cfr. Lib. *Or.* 25, 43, where a similar expression – τῆς πόλεως προστατεύων – is used of the *principales*.

<sup>9</sup> The twin sites of Bekârlar/Nenizi and Sultan Turbe (the one a village with traces of ancient settlement, the other a large sherd scatter around a Seljuk tomb) have never been excavated: see most recently J. MOSSAY, *Nazianze. Nenezi. Bekârlar*, in «Byzantion», 71 (2001), pp. 438-450; also F. HILD, M. RESTLE, *Kappadokien: (Kappadokia, Charsianon, Sebasteia und Lykandos)* (TIB 2), Wien 1981, pp. 244-245.

One of the advantages of using Gregory's career as a case-study for the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical elites is that we can in this instance make some geographical sense of the physical constraints on their actions and interactions. Gregory's family estate, with the dependent village of Arianzus, was at Karbala, ten kilometres due South of the city and 300m above it, beyond the forbidding ridge of the Melendiz Dag. To the North, the city's territory extended some fifty kilometres, as far as the River Halys and the village of Venasa, modern Avanos, where a presbyter looked after the church – but was then subverted by his deacon Glycerius, who caused a scandal by recruiting a touring choir of consecrated virgins (*Epp.* 246-248). Ten kilometres South-East of Karbala, and still up in the hills, was Doara, a village in a fertile upland enclave where Gregory installed a bishop, a *chorepiscopus* subordinate to Nazianzus (*Or.* 13)<sup>10</sup>. 25 Kilometres further East still, but now back down in the plain, was Sasima, the next station after Nazianzus (24 Roman miles, according to the itineraries) on the main highway from Constantinople to Antioch, and where Gregory was notoriously appointed bishop himself – but once it is realized that Sasima was inside the civic territory of Nazianzus, much about this mysterious episode becomes instantly clear<sup>11</sup>. Another village in the territory of Nazianzus was Borissus, which was only five kilometres from Nazianzus (and would be easily visible from there) if the topographers are right in identifying it as Sovular<sup>12</sup>. Here again, as at Venasa, the church was managed by a presbyter – but while Gregory's father was bishop at Nazianzus, the presbyter of Borissus (and his family) converted to the Eunomian heresy<sup>13</sup>; like Venasa, therefore, this church remained beyond the bishop's reach. And the rebel presbyter

<sup>10</sup> For the local geography, see the entries in HILD, RESTLE, *Kappadokien* (cit. n. 9), pp. 150-151 (Arianzus), 171-172 (Doara), 200-201 (Karbala), 302 (Venasa).

<sup>11</sup> The most recent discussion of this celebrated episode is VAN DAM, *Families and Friends* (cit. n. 7), pp. 163-165; there is a full account in J.A. MCGUCKIN, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography*, Crestwood (NY) 2001, pp. 187-203.

<sup>12</sup> HILD, RESTLE, *Kappadokien* (cit. n. 9), p. 159.

<sup>13</sup> Philost. *H.E.* 9, 9.



must be counted among the local elite, for his grandson Philostorgius would go to Constantinople for a rhetorical education.

At Nazianzus we can therefore visualize in concrete terms what we know in abstract about any city, that being bishop was problematic (at least for a bishop who wanted to impose himself on the people who mattered): the physical reach of his authority was seriously restricted. And this was especially true of Nazianzus, where the city cathedral is unlikely to have been the regular focus for the devotions of the Christian elite. On Sundays, landowners could stay home to patronize their own safely dependent priests, at Venasa, Borissus, or Sasima – Gregory's sister is an example, for she married a local aristocrat and seems to have devoted herself entirely to the village church<sup>14</sup>. In other words, the bishop and his cathedral clergy were bound to a routine that did not necessarily involve the secular Christian elite: it is no coincidence, then, that the second sermon that Gregory preached as presbyter (*Or.* 3) was an angry criticism of those who had failed to attend his first<sup>15</sup>. The problem was especially serious for Gregory, who had grown up among these absentees, so would instinctively measure his authority by their response to him. Gregory had also practised as a rhetorician at Nazianzus for some time (rather longer, probably, than modern studies have tended to allow) prior to his ordination<sup>16</sup>; he will therefore have had to adjust to the difference between his cathedral congregation and the audiences that had gathered for his previous performances.

<sup>14</sup> Undue credence has been given to the scholion by Elias of Crete claiming that she lived in Iconium. Her local pastor, a priest with two children consecrated to God (*Or.* 8, 11) should instead be identified as Nicomedes, elsewhere mentioned by Gregory as a presbyter running a church in the territory of Nazianzus (*Carm.* 2. 2. 1, 145–168; *Anth. Pal.* 8, 140). For Gorgonia's overweening behaviour in the local church, see *Or.* 8, 18, with MCGUCKIN, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus* (cit. n. 11), p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> MCGUCKIN, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus* (cit. n. 11), pp. 109–110, suggests ingeniously but without warrant that these non-attendees were rebel monks.

<sup>16</sup> On this see N.B. MCLYNN, *Among the Hellenists: Gregory and the Sophists*, in J. BØRTNES, T. HÄGG (eds.), *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections*, Copenhagen 2006 pp. 213–238, at pp. 220–228.

The most illuminating phase of Gregory's career, for the student of elite transformation, is the two-year period following his return from Constantinople to Nazianzus, in summer 381. The ambiguous circumstances of his resignation from Constantinople helped drive him into an untenable position. Gregory vehemently refused to accept the official conciliar verdict, endorsed by his Cappadocian fellow-bishops, that he was properly bishop of Nazianzus (which would imply that his consecration at Constantinople had been illegitimate); however, his indignant refusal to resume his liturgical responsibilities at Nazianzus was interpreted locally, he concedes, as arrogance<sup>17</sup>. We obtain an impression of what this perceived arrogance involved through three successive letters which he sent to a local notable, Celeusius, following an encounter during Lent 382 (*Epp.* 112-114). Observing the fast in ostentatious silence, Gregory had offended Celeusius by refusing to speak with him. The letters reflect an escalating dispute over etiquette. In the first (*Ep.* 112) Gregory issued a solemn demand that Celeusius «purify» his «tribunal»<sup>18</sup>; this seems to have provoked a sharp rejoinder, for Gregory was finally stung into a laboured insult, thinly disguised as a classical fable: Celeusius was a goose, who should cease his cackling until Gregory – the «swan» – was ready to speak (*Ep.* 114). We might infer that Celeusius had meanwhile been casting public aspersions on Gregory's claims to be cultured<sup>19</sup>; the crushing savagery of the retort suggests the importance, for Gregory, of winning such battles. On the other hand, we should sympathize with Celeusius, who as a responsible Christian layman at Nazianzus had a

<sup>17</sup> See especially *Carm.* 2. 1. 19, 49-51, 72-74.

<sup>18</sup> The nature of Celeusius' office is unclear: he presided over a tribunal, but was not a provincial governor. M.-M. HAUSER-MEURY, *Prosopographie zu den Schriften Gregors von Nazianz*, Bonn 1960, pp. 52-53, interpreted Gregory's comment that he should not "make a spectacle of himself" in "putting on shameful displays" literally, and made him a *duovir* at Nazianzus; if the expression is taken metaphorically, he might be a *defensor civitatis* instead.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory's reply (*Ep.* 114) begins as follows: «Since you reproach me for my silence and boorishness (*agroikian*), you chattering urbanite, come, I shall tell a tale not without refinement (*ouk amouson*)». Cfr. his letters to Basil over the Sasima episode, *Epp.* 48-49, where he answers the same charge with similar vehemence.

legitimate interest in discovering Gregory's intentions for the approaching Easter festival. The episode helps us understand the determination of local leaders to impose a formal role on Gregory, and to resist his pleas to be excused on grounds of ill-health. Elaborate manoeuvres continued until the summer of 382, when (following the temporary seizure of his see by an Apollinarist anti-bishop) Gregory grudgingly conceded defeat, and resumed his responsibilities as bishop.

## 2. *Bully Pulpit: Bishop, Councillors and Governor*

The events of the following year, when Gregory transformed his defeat into eventual victory by engineering his replacement as bishop by his cousin Eulalius, show him dealing with both the local authorities at Nazianzus (his own clergy and the city council) and also the provincial magistrates and the Cappadocian ecclesiastical hierarchy; as such, these events provide one of our best sources on the changing dynamics of power at local level. The key episode is a crisis which caused Gregory to write two successive letters to the governor Olympius. In the first (*Ep.* 142) he explains that since he is too sick to visit personally, the letter is his «embassy», urging Olympius to spare the *politeuomenoi*, the city councillors, who were delivering it, and who looked to the bishop's *parrhesia* with the governor; Gregory urged him also to spare the «others» who were under his own direct care. The circumstances are partly elucidated by a second letter (*Ep.* 141) which exclaims that the very survival of the city of Nazianzus was at stake. A personified «Diocaesarea» pleads eloquently; then Gregory speaks in his own person, and provides sufficient detail to allow us to infer at least an outline of events. Three different groups are involved. The governor's «command» had been criminally defied by certain «youths», who had evidently, from Gregory's language, been involved in a riot<sup>20</sup>. He explains that

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<sup>20</sup> Gregory discusses the overthrow of statues in the future conditional (*Ep.* 141, 9): it is not certain, then, that those involved in the riot had been guilty of anything so drastic as the toppling of imperial images, as assumed by e.g. R. VAN DAM, *Kingdom of Snow: Roman Rule and Greek Culture in Cappadocia*, Philadelphia 2002, p. 85.

the culprits had been driven mad with sorrow at being «citizens without a city», but he spares little energy in defending the indefensible. Instead he pleads for a second group, consisting of «all the citizens, the civic leaders and the dignitaries», urging Olympius on their behalf (and his own) not to deprive Nazianzus of its formal civic status. It is impossible to be certain what had happened, but we might surmise that an initial order by Olympius (the same which had prompted Gregory's first letter) had imposed conditions that seemed *equivalent* to a loss of civic rights; after Gregory's first appeal (delivered, presumably, at the provincial capital by a delegation of city councilors) had failed, the «young men» had vented their frustrations in a riot; and this in turn had led Olympius both to order severe punishment for these rioters and to pronounce, or at least threaten, a formal removal of the city's title and privileges. The procedure matches what happened after the famous riot at Antioch several years later; moreover, it seems that at Nazianzus, as at Antioch, ultimate responsibility was being placed on the city council<sup>21</sup>. For in concluding his appeal, Gregory mentions a third group of people, the «wretched outcasts» who had «fallen previously into misery»<sup>22</sup> – who should be identified as the same curial envoys on whose behalf he had written *Ep.* 142. He claims to have witnesses to prove their innocence of the recent riot; we can therefore suppose that these men had offended Olympius by their complaint against his initial measures, and were now suspected of having mobilizing the crowd to lend weight to their cause. Gregory was again acting on their behalf; but his plea, it might be noted, is rather lacking in vehemence.

These letters have been taken as evidence for Gregory's civic patriotism, and his readiness to defend his city against

<sup>21</sup> On the riot at Antioch, see most recently H. LEPPIN, *Steuern, Aufstand und Rhetoren: Der Antiochener Steueraufstand von 387 in christlicher und heidnischer Deutung*, in H. BRANDT (ed.), *Gedeutete Realität: Krisen, Wirklichkeiten, Interpretationen (3.-6. Jh. n. Chr)* (Historia Einzelschriften, 134), Stuttgart 1999, pp. 103-123.

<sup>22</sup> *Ep.* 141, 10. P. GALLAY, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze: Lettres*, Paris 1964-1967, II, p. 31 mistranslates the crucial phrase τῶν προεμπετωκότων as «qui sont tombés précédemment entre tes mains»; compare instead the usage at *Or.* 16, 19; *Ep.* 35.

the state<sup>23</sup>; however, there is a solid basis for a more skeptical interpretation, since another text survives which bears upon this episode – the sermon that Gregory preached when Olympius arrived in Nazianzus to pronounce judgement. This is *Oratio* 17, «To the anxious *curiales* (*politeuomenous*) of Nazianzus and the angry governor», which most scholars have dated ten years earlier, and whose connection with this incident they have therefore failed to recognize<sup>24</sup>; and in any case the speech has not seemed to be one of his most inspiring, since the second half – addressed directly to the angry governor – seems to stutter repetitively towards an anticlimax<sup>25</sup>. But this is because Gregory keeps pausing, so that the governor could be seen to consider his decision; and the true climax of the speech would come after it was over, when Olympius would announce his verdict. In other words, the speech represents a drama of reconciliation – and a very carefully stage-managed one, where Gregory and the governor both knew what was going to happen but the audience did not. We should therefore imagine the *curiales* in the congregation looking backwards and forwards between the bishop and the governor, scanning the latter's face for clues to their fate: the occasion encapsulates with a vividness matched by few other fourth-century texts the possibilities for alliance between Christian church and Roman state. The bishop is acting in partnership with the governor, not his fellow-citizens.

Gregory does not explain in his sermon or letters how the trouble had started, but it is highly likely that fiscal pres-

<sup>23</sup> Gregory's "patriotic devotion" is emphasized by T. KOPECEK, *The Cappadocian Fathers and Civic Patriotism*, in «ChHist», 43 (1974), pp. 293-303, at pp. 297-298; see also P. GALLAY, *La vie de Saint Grégoire de Nazianze*, Paris 1943, p. 222; MCGUCKIN, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus* (cit. n. 11), 396.

<sup>24</sup> Thus J. BERNARDI, *La prédication des pères cappadociens*, Paris 1968, pp. 121-124; GALLAY, *La vie* (cit. n. 23), pp. 123-124; MCGUCKIN, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus* (cit. n. 11), pp. 211-214; M. VINSON, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Select Orations* (Fathers of the Church, 107), Washington DC 2003, p. 85. Gregory's appeal that the governor respect «these grey hairs» (*Or.* 17, 12) has been interpreted to imply the presence of his father, who died in 374; but he uses exactly the same expression of himself when appealing to Olympius in *Ep.* 141, 8.

<sup>25</sup> MCGUCKIN supposes that it has been stitched together from two separate speeches: *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus* (cit. n. 11), pp. 212-214.

sure was the ultimate cause. In his sermon Gregory reminded his flock pointedly, paraphrasing Saint Paul, that they were «subject to tax» (*Or.* 17, 6); he here reveals their grievance only to brush it aside, and to command that «when we do evil we should not hate the Law, or wait for the sword to strike, but should purify ourselves by fear, and so receive praise from the ruling power». But there should be no doubt that the tax burden was a genuine issue – and that it bore upon the councillors of Nazianzus as well as upon the ordinary citizens. Whereas in the previous generation Gregory's father had had the opportunity to profit, as a senior member of the council, from his tax-gathering duties, the *curiales* were now enjoined simply to fear God as well as to «pass Caesar's taxes on to Caesar»<sup>26</sup>. In fact, there is independent evidence that Nazianzus had particular cause for complaint at this time. September 382 had marked the beginning of a new five-year fiscal cycle, and the troubles must have coincided almost exactly with this<sup>27</sup>. And in March 386 – that is, towards the end of the same cycle – the emperor Theodosius would instruct his Praetorian Prefect to advertise a more equitable «rate of equalization» (in effect halving the poll tax) specifically for four Pontic cities, including «Diocaesarea in Second Cappadocia» – that is, Nazianzus<sup>28</sup>. Gregory's sermon, however, does not hint that there was any justice in the tax-payers' complaints. Not the least important shift in elite municipal politics in this period was the new type of rhetoric that now emanated from the pulpit, which could complicate the delicate nexus of patronage and obligation upon which the fiscal system so depended – and did not always operate disinterestedly. Relevant here is a letter

<sup>26</sup> *Or.* 19, 11. In this interesting passage, addressed directly to the *curiales*, Gregory moves away from their fiscal role to a purely generalized appeal for them to show compassion, charity and clemency, and not to wallow in luxury while others were suffering – all points which (as he himself notes: *Or.* 19, 12) applied not merely to *curiales* but to all citizens. On this speech and its context, see most recently S. HOLMAN, *Taxing Nazianzus: Gregory and the other Julian*, in *SP*, 37 (2001), pp. 103–109, usefully emphasizing its equivalence to a civic liturgy.

<sup>27</sup> Gregory was not yet acting as bishop in June 382, when a council was held in Constantinople (*Ep.* 130); by the time a further council was convened in June 383, he had already resigned his see (*Ep.* 173).

<sup>28</sup> *C. Th.* 13, 11, 2.

from Gregory to the *curiales* of Nazianzus, claiming that their determination to impose the *chrysargyron* upon the deacon Theotecnus meant «stripping the clothes from a man already naked» (*Ep.* 98). The accusations were characteristically stinging, but the councillors were perfectly within their rights to levy this tax upon clergymen, and the sheer variety of objections that Gregory raises (that Theotecnus was poor, that he was foreign, that he was performing a public service by managing a martyr shrine) suggests the weakness of his case. The *curiales* of Nazianzus, under unrelenting external pressure to meet their fiscal obligations, can be forgiven for finding such obstruction frustrating.

The episode of the riot was thus important in bringing about direct collaboration between Gregory and the governor Olympius, and is to be connected with the special relationship that developed between them, which is apparent not only in Gregory's oration (the only speech to survive where he himself is not the principal focus of attention) but in the thirteen letters he addressed to Olympius, far more than survive from him to any other governor<sup>29</sup>. Most of them asked favourable consideration for a succession of litigants and miscreants due to appear before the governor's tribunal. It is impossible to be sure, of course, whether Gregory's success in such cases was the cause or the consequence of his dealings with the governor concerning the riot, but Gregory's caution in the two relevant letters suggests the latter. The riot will moreover have brought home to Olympius the advantage of having a dependable ally inside Nazianzus. For all his formidable authority, the late antique governor was in his own way as helpless before the inexorable fiscal demands of the government as were the councillors who collected the taxes and the citizens who paid them<sup>30</sup>. Olympius was ultimately responsible for ensuring that his province paid its allotted quota; clemency and severity, insofar as either might affect the local tax base, therefore both had their dangers. In promising to broadcast Olympius' qualities (*Ep.* 146, 8), Gregory

<sup>29</sup> Asterius (Olympius' assessor) receives five, and Nemesius four. Basil's correspondence has nothing to match. VAN DAM, *Kingdom of Snow* (cit. n. 20), pp. 84-86, has some useful remarks about the relationship.

<sup>30</sup> VAN DAM, *Kingdom of Snow* (cit. n. 20), esp. pp. 80-82, 92-94.

was offering not flattery but a valuable service; and he showed his command of the clichés of late antique *politesse* when he remarked, at the end of the governor's term of office, that without Olympius the provincials now indeed belonged to *Cappadocia Secunda*, «when thanks to you they had become *Prima*» (Ep. 154, 2)<sup>31</sup>. But the relationship required action as well as words from Gregory: he cannot have found it comfortable when Olympius delegated him to mediate (but without any powers of jurisdiction) in an awkward divorce case being organized by a local notable on his daughter's behalf (Epp. 144-145).

### 3. Otium: *Escape from Liturgy*

Gregory had particular reason to commit himself to Olympius, since he was trying to win release from the episcopal office to which his fellow-citizens were determined to bind him. But if his circumstances were thus unusual, the pressures operative will have applied to all curial churchmen everywhere: their interests in certain respects (notably their commitment to defend clerical privilege) will necessarily have diverged from those of their former peers. Moreover, they retained the family obligations which had traditionally driven elite participation in municipal politics. One episode in particular from this same phase of Gregory's career brings home this aspect powerfully, and also demonstrates the significance for Gregory of his relationship with Olympius. In a letter to Olympius, again written from his sick-bed, Gregory explains how he had «found» his nephew Nicobulus suffering from his «charge of the *mansio*» (Ep. 126). Nicobulus had served as an official in the provincial administration, so was liable on retirement to a five-year term of *exhibitio cursus*<sup>32</sup>. The *mansio* to which he was assigned was probably that of Nazianzus itself, since Gregory refers to it (as he does elsewhere in his correspon-

<sup>31</sup> For the mistaken belief that this piece of gallantry refers to a further division (and previous reunification) of the province, see below, n. 39.

<sup>32</sup> JONES, *Later Roman Empire* (cit. n. 1), p. 832 (referring to the case of Nicobulus at n. 18).



dence) without feeling obliged to specify further<sup>33</sup>; the most likely solution to the mystery of the "double site" at Nazianzus is that this *mansio* was situated a few miles outside the city<sup>34</sup>. It seems that Olympius indeed helped procure Nicobulus' release; but a further letter reveals that this provoked resentment. Nicobulus was accused before the governor for some unspecified misbehaviour by his slaves (*Ep.* 146), which presumably provided the basis for a charge of misconduct in his management of the *mansio*. As a result, he or else his sons faced what Gregory called «slavery» – that is, enrolment in the city council, from which his service otherwise exempted them<sup>35</sup>. And the case against Nicobulus had been brought, according to Gregory, by someone on whose behalf he himself had recently interceded with the governor: far the most likely such intercession (unless we imagine an act of monstrous ingratitude from a beneficiary of an individual commendation) was that which he had made collectively for the curial delegation to Olympius<sup>36</sup>.

We can understand why councillors of Nazianzus might resent Gregory's success in excusing Nicobulus, who had escaped municipal service by attaching himself to the provincial bureaucracy, from the one obligation which should have fallen to him instead. In the zero-sum game of civic duty, the burden of the post which he had vacated will simply have been transferred – quite probably, indeed, to the local council. Gregory meanwhile betrays by the urgency of his appeal to Olympius (this is the letter where he explicitly promises, in return for the governor's support, «to make

<sup>33</sup> R. VAN DAM, *Governors of Cappadocia during the Fourth Century*, in «Medieval Prosopography», 17 (1996), pp. 7-93, at p. 23, claims that Nicobulus «may just as well have been living in Cappadocia Prima» (cfr. pp. 51-52); but note *Epp.* 68, 1; 133, 1, where in each case Gregory similarly refers simply to «the *mansio*», in a context implying proximity to Nazianzus but physical separation.

<sup>34</sup> See above, at n. 9.

<sup>35</sup> MCGUCKIN, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus* (cit. n. 11), p. 395 n. 139, supposes that Nicobulus was endangered with literal slavery, but the sons of a delinquent *manceps* would not conceivably be thus liable. For curial service as «slavery», cfr. *Lib. Ep.* 375.

<sup>36</sup> Note Gregory's rhetorical question, in almost the same breath, whether «the councils will be enhanced» if «private interests cause vexation» (*Ep.* 126, 6: mistranslated by Galloway at *Lettres* [cit. n. 22], II, p. 38).

your administration celebrated among all those to whom I am known»: *Ep.* 146, 8) how little he could afford to lose this case. The key to the situation is his remark that his niece's husband had become «subject to envy through my own account» – where he also concedes that it was thanks to his own influence that Nicobulus was now «freer than he ought to be» (*Ep.* 146, 4). With this comment Gregory not only reveals how much of his own local prestige was now invested in his nephew's cause, but also acknowledges that his position was, objectively, indefensible. Gregory's grimly determined appeal (which is reinforced by a pair of letters to the governor's influential assessor, Asterius: *Epp.* 147-148) thus indicates the sheer difficulty a bishop would face in keeping (and being seen to keep) his priestly hands clean of the grubbiness of municipal politics. It also suggests the pressure that will have operated against Gregory as he tried to negotiate his retirement – to other «slaves» of civic routine at Nazianzus he could easily look like an ecclesiastical equivalent of Nicobulus, dishonourably evading his legitimate responsibilities.

Gregory would probably not have been able to extract himself from these routines without the leverage afforded him by his partnership with Olympius; but this by itself was not enough. Only the bishops of Cappadocia could authorize Gregory's retirement – and in 381 they seem to have insisted unanimously that he do his duty, not least his old friend and nearest episcopal neighbour Bosporius of Colonia<sup>37</sup>. Bosporius enjoyed warm relations with at least one influential Christian landowner at Nazianzus, and such attachments might in this case have taken priority over his long-established ties to Gregory himself<sup>38</sup>. But Gregory was eventually able to defeat this nexus by developing a new ecclesiastical alignment – a process which was proba-

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<sup>37</sup> He complains bitterly to Bosporius in three letters: *Ep.* 89 (on his shame at being dishonoured by those «from whom I least expected it»), 138 (accusing him and his cohorts of devising «outrage to pile upon outrage»), 153 (proclaiming that he has «twice now been tripped and tricked»).

<sup>38</sup> For Bosporius and Vitalianus, see *Carm.* 2.2.3, 242; further, N.B. McLynn, *The Other Olympias: Gregory Nazianzen and the Family of Vitalianus*, in «ZAC», 2 (1998), pp. 227-246, esp. p. 244. For the «common table» that Gregory had himself shared with Bosporius, see *Ep.* 89.

bly facilitated at least indirectly by the stream of petitioners bearing letters from him to Olympius. The governor was based at Tyana, provincial capital of Cappadocia II<sup>39</sup>; but in the immediate aftermath of his return from Constantinople Gregory seems to have recognized the metropolitan authority of Helladius, bishop of Caesarea. In the memorial speech for Basil probably delivered in January 382 (but possibly some months earlier or later)<sup>40</sup>, Gregory had recalled the conflict over metropolitan authority that had arisen between Basil of Caesarea (who had insisted that his previous rights were unaffected) and Anthimus of Tyana when Cappadocia had been divided in 372, and had taken sides unequivocally: Anthimus was the villain, forcing a secular political structure on the church, while Basil had held to the «ancient customs and the ancestral division»<sup>41</sup>. At Easter 382, Gregory (although he still refused to accept his own episcopal obligations) was still treating Helladius of Caesarea as his metropolitan, acknowledging his formal announcement of the date of the feast – and petitioning him to appoint a new bishop in Nazianzus (*Ep.* 120). Perhaps Helladius had taken advantage of Anthimus' death (which must have taken place in the late 370s) and the low profile of his transient successor Aetherius to reassert Basil's claim; the surviving list of signatories to the Council of Constantinople

<sup>39</sup> I am grateful to Christian Raschle for pointing out to me the indefensibility of the conventional view, set out in E. HONIGMANN, *Trois mémoires postumes d'Histoire et de Géographie de l'Orient chrétien* (ed. P. Devos, Brussels 1961), pp. 29–31 – and endorsed in e.g. GALLAY, *Lettres* (cit. n. 22), II, p. 149 n. 3; VAN DAM, *Governors of Cappadocia* (cit. n. 33) pp. 10–12, 65–66; VAN DAM, *Kingdom of Snow* (cit. n. 20), pp. 35–36, 86 – that Cappadocia had been reunited into a single province in the late 370s, and was then re-divided in 382. This view was based upon an impossibly strained interpretation of Gregory's parting politeness at the end of the governor's tenure that Nazianzus now again belonged to «second» Cappadocia, having been in the «first» thanks to Olympius (*Ep.* 154, 2); cfr. below, n. 42, for the ecclesiastical evidence.

<sup>40</sup> The only external evidence for the date is an apparent reference in *De Vita Sua*, 386–388; for the range of possibilities, see MCGUCKIN, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus* (cit. n. 11), pp. 372–373.

<sup>41</sup> *Or.* 43, 58. For the context of the speech, see N.B. MCLYNN, *Gregory Nazianzen's Basil: The Literary Construction of a Christian Friendship*, in *SP*, 37 (2001), pp. 178–193.

group the Cappadocians under a single heading<sup>42</sup>. Or perhaps Gregory, whose previous contacts with Tyana seem to have been intermittent, was simply trying to exploit his existing connections (such as they were) with the church of Caesarea<sup>43</sup>. It is perhaps symptomatic of the family's instinctive orientation that when Nicobulus was appointed to the *mansio*, he went to Caesarea to mobilize his patrons; Gregory duly supplied a note to Helladius<sup>44</sup>.

Gregory had also, that same Easter 382, responded graciously when the recently-appointed Theodore of Tyana sent a gift, and assumed a genial paternal role towards his «son» (*Ep.* 121). The following Easter, however, when Gregory had resumed his duties as bishop, the relationships had changed. Helladius again sent gifts and formal notice, and received a polite, but curiously non-committal reply (*Ep.* 172); on the other hand Gregory enclosed with his letter to Tyana (*Ep.* 115) a significant present, a copy of the *Philocalia* of Origen, which he advertised specifically as a «souvenir from me, which is also the Holy Basil's»<sup>45</sup>. Such a gift had particular relevance at this precise time, for Theodore and Helladius were just then reopening the same conflict

<sup>42</sup> C.H. TURNER, *Ecclesiae Occidentalis Monumenta Iuris Antiquissima*, Oxford 1939, II, pp. 446-447. This might possibly reflect a decision by the Cappadocian contingent to coordinate their votes; but the order of sees (beginning Caesarea, Nyssa, Tyana, and Colonia) reveals that the two bishoprics in Cappadocia I are followed by those in Cappadocia II, which suggests that the heading for Cappadocia II in the original rubric might simply have gone astray. VAN DAM, *Governors of Cappadocia* (cit. n. 33), p. 10 n. 10, defending the view that the list reflects a politically reunited province, suggests that Nyssa was ranked above Tyana because of Gregory Nyssen's post-conciliar role as an arbiter of communion in Pontus; but the imperial letter conferring this (*C. Th.* 16, 1, 3) was issued after the close of the council. Nor can length of tenure have been the criterion, for Bosphorus of Colonia had served longer than any of those ranked above him.

<sup>43</sup> One visit to Tyana is recorded in his correspondence, to seek medical treatment during the mid-370s: *Ep.* 67. For the suggestion that Gregory's direct dealings with Caesarea had been less extensive than is commonly believed, see MCLYNN, *Gregory Nazianzen's Basil* (cit. n. 41), p. 179.

<sup>44</sup> *Ep.* 127. Nicobulus had presumably served on the governor's staff before the division of the province in 372, when the headquarters had been at Caesarea.

<sup>45</sup> For the provenance and authorship of this much-discussed work, see N.B. MCLYNN, *What was the "Philocalia" of Origen?*, in «Meddelanden från Collegium Patristicum Lundense», 19 (2004), pp. 32-43.

over metropolitan rights that Basil had fought against Anthimus of Tyana, with a bitterness that would become notorious<sup>46</sup>. Gregory's gift thus signalled a change of allegiance, and should be seen politically, as a symbolic offer of Basil's legacy (insofar at this was in his keeping) to the bishop of Tyana. A gradual courtship of Theodore during the previous year, corresponding to the development of Gregory's relationship with Olympius, can be charted in the correspondence<sup>47</sup>. When the Apollinarist confrontation was escalating during the summer of 382, Gregory had professed himself completely in Theodore's hands: «the province», he said, had no «other head» than Theodore, and therefore he looked entirely to him to provide a new bishop for Nazianzus (*Ep.* 152). A subsequent letter, precisely dated by the Cappadocian calendar to late September (and the year can only be 382, since Gregory was acting as bishop), invited Theodore to the annual martyr's feast at «your» Arianus (the possessive again acknowledged, more subtly, Theodore's metropolitan claims), where they could share views on «not a few ecclesiastical matters» (*Ep.* 122)<sup>48</sup>. At this meeting (for Theodore seems to have swallowed the bait: *Ep.* 123) Gregory would be able to press his suit directly, in the safely controlled environment of his private family martyrism; and the result was an invitation to a further meeting, at Tyana – Gregory carefully stipulated privacy (*Ep.* 124). At this stage Gregory was perhaps still playing off the rival metropolitans against one another. But Theodore, as a newly-appointed bishop anxious to assert his authority, had more reason than Helladius to act; and within a few months of Gregory's gift at Easter 383, by June at the latest, the

<sup>46</sup> Severus of Antioch would recall it over a century later, noting that Gregory Nazianzen supported Theodore and Gregory Nyssen Helladius: E.W. BROOKS, *The Sixth Book of the Select Letters of Severus Patriarch of Antioch*, vol. 2, London 1904, II, p. 205.

<sup>47</sup> There is no space here to discuss the complex details of the chronology of these letters; but the overall character of Gregory's burgeoning relationship with Theodore, and the parallel to the consolidation of his ties with Olympius, ought to be clear.

<sup>48</sup> The expression should not be interpreted to mean that Theodore too was a native of Arianus (Gregory's other letters to him hardly presuppose the familiarity that would come from so close a connection); cfr. HAUSER-MEURY, *Prosopographie* (cit. n. 18), p. 164 n. 350.

bishops of Cappadocia II had installed Eulalius as his replacement<sup>49</sup>.

The consecration of Eulalius was not the end of the controversy – there would be further interference from Helladius, who seems to have challenged the legality of the consecration (*Ep.* 183), and Nicobulus' enemies would likewise haunt the family even after his death (*Epp.* 195-196). The pressures which we have seen Gregory negotiating were permanent features of civic life, and as long as he continued to live in Nazianzus it was impossible to escape them definitively. And part of the value of the case study that has been presented here is precisely that it offers an unusually well-focussed snapshot of an individual dealing on the one hand with the demands of his fellow-townsmen, and on the other with the concerns of external authorities – in this case both provincial bishops and the provincial governor. Two aspects of Gregory's story in particular are of significance to the student of late antique elites. First, his search for release from his episcopal obligations at Nazianzus provides a parallel for the well-documented (at least in general terms) phenomenon whereby *curiales* sought exemption from their liability to civic liturgies; and his recruitment of patrons at the provincial level, and the obstacles he had to overcome locally, might usefully be compared to the experiences of some of Libanius' correspondents and protégés. Especially important, I would suggest, are the indications that Gregory himself cultivated Olympius and Theodore, and sought to involve them in his affairs, and thus in the affairs of Nazianzus. It is generally agreed that the decisive political transformation during this period involved a shift of power away from the cities and to the central government, this case offers an example of how the initiative for this might originate from within the cities themselves.

Second, and equally important, is the point that the negotiations which have been described here, although conducted with a view to an unusual objective, must have been a familiar part of the small-town bishop's experience – and

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<sup>49</sup> The *terminus ante quem* is provided by *Ep.* 173, 7, referring to the conference at Constantinople held in June 383, where Gregory declares that he had now retired from office.

especially for any member of the local elite who became bishop of the city where he had been raised, where his peers sat on the council and his family kept pressing him with their demands for assistance. Even if Gregory had dutifully submitted to his routine, and stayed in his post, he would still have had to decide how far to commit himself to the defence of those responsible for the riot at Nazianzus, how far to go in helping Nicobulus escape his burdens, how far to commit himself to the governor Olympius, and how far to commit himself to either side in the quarrel between the bishops of Tyana and Caesarea. Although many bishops emerged from among the social elite of their own cities, Gregory is one of the very few whose local career can be followed in any detail. We must therefore ask to what extent the tensions that have been traced here, with their hints of manipulation, collusion, corruption, and parochial feuds, was typical of the experience of those small-town notables who dared to claim for themselves the charismatic authority of the Christian priesthood.

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